September 2004

Forest Plan

Phase II Amendment DEIS Newsletter

In This Issue

Draft EIS Available for Public Review and Comment!

This newsletter announces the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Phase II Amendment (Phase II DEIS) to the Black Hills National Forest (Forest) Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) and the beginning of a 90-day public comment period. A very important section to help the reviewer effectively comment on the DEIS is also included. Effective comments will contribute to the final Phase II Amendment decisions to be made after the 90-day public comment period. The complete Phase II DEIS is available for public review and comment on the Black Hills National Forest website (http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/blackhills/projects/planning).

Compact disks of the complete Phase II DEIS are available upon request from the Black Hills National Forest.

Phase II DEIS paper copies are available for review at Black Hills local public libraries, Black Hills National Forest offices, and other local government agencies.

This newsletter contains a summary outlining the major issues, conclusions, decisions to be made, and alternatives examined in detail in the Phase II DEIS.

The 90-day public comment period will begin on the day the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency publishes the Phase II DEIS Notice of Availability (NOA) in the Federal Register and will end 89 days later. As soon as they are known, the review dates will be published on the Black Hills website.

Alternative 6 has been identified as the Phase II DEIS preferred alternative. This is not a final decision but an aid to the reviewer to better provide more focused comments to consider in the final decisions to be made after the 90-day public comment period.

After a review of the alternatives in the Phase II DEIS, the environmental effects to species viability, the impacts to local communities, and the sustainability of the Forest as a whole, Alternative 6 was selected as the preferred alternative at the draft stage of the Forest Plan Amendment process for the following reasons:

1. It maintains species viability for all emphasis species on the forest;
2. Reduces fire and mountain pine beetle hazard more than the other alternatives; and
3. Recommends five candidate RNAs to provide for more species conservation.

Brad Exton
Acting Forest Supervisor
Black Hills National Forest

Brief Alternative Description

The following is a brief description of the alternatives. People wanting more information can see the DEIS Summary beginning on page 3 or the entire DEIS on the Forest website or request a DEIS Compact Disk (See letter above).

Need to know where to send your comments? See page 12!

Alternative 1—No-Action, 1997 Forest Plan (LRMP). Incorporates direction to provide for species viability and reduce fire and mountain pine beetle hazard. No additional RNAs recommended.

Alternative 2 —No-Action, Phase I Amendment. Same as Alternative 1 with an increased emphasis on late-successional species protection.

Alternative 3 — Diversity Across the Landscape. Emphasizes species viability for all emphasis species. Reduces fire and mountain pine beetle hazard in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) and as needed for emphasis species conservation. Recommends establishing four candidate RNAs.

Alternative 4 — Phase I with Additional Mature Forests. Emphasizes species viability for late-successional species. Reduces fire and mountain pine beetle hazard in the WUI. Recommends establishing nine candidate RNAs.

Alternative 6 — Reduce fire-and-mountain-pine-beetle hazard. Emphasizes reduced fire and mountain pine beetle hazard in the WUI and across the Forest at levels that maintain species viability on the Forest. Recommends establishing five candidate RNAs.

Providing Effective Comments on the Draft EIS

After reviewing a copy of the Draft EIS, please provide us with your views, technical advice, historical knowledge, and local expertise. Good land use planning requires a careful assessment of the competing demands of various public land users under the umbrella of existing laws, regulations, and policies. The Draft EIS was prepared in compliance with the Federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 as amended. Public comments are an important part of the NFMA planning and NEPA process.

Effective comments are those providing useful information to U.S. Forest Service decision-makers. Here are some suggestions when commenting on a NEPA or planning document:

- Become familiar with the contents of the Draft EIS, including the purpose and need and decisions to be made (See Phase II DEIS Chapter 1 Sections 4 - 5).
- Comment within the scope of the decisions to be made in Chapter 1 of the DEIS.
- Be as specific as possible with your comments and reference page numbers and paragraphs from the Draft EIS.
- Focus comments on a particular issue or resource and back up your statements with explanations, facts, and references.
- Provide specific statements with details. For example, if you are concerned about biological resources, focus on a particular issue such as a species that you feel was not sufficiently analyzed instead of making a broad statement such as, "The document did not adequately study biological resources."

Remember that comments on the Draft EIS are not counted as votes; rather, they are used to improve the Draft EIS and better disclose effects on people and resources in the Final EIS before the Forest Service makes an informed decision based on ecological effects and impacts to people.

Effective comments are those that accomplish the following:

- Describe something missed in the Draft EIS that might have affected the outcome of the analysis;
- Provide new information that could change an analysis in the document;
- Identify something that should be clarified; or
- Propose a substantially different reasonable alternative that has not been considered and is within the scope of the purpose and need described in Chapter 1 of the Draft EIS.

Comments that meet the above four criteria and are within the scope of the decisions will receive a detailed response in the Final EIS. Similar comments from multiple sources will be summarized.

Remember, this process will be more effective if your comments are clear, concise and relevant to the Draft EIS. The more effective they are, the more likely they are to influence the final decisions.

The Forest will respond to your comments in the Final EIS in one of the following ways (40 CFR 1503.4):

1. By modifying alternatives, including the proposed action;
2. By developing and evaluating alternatives not previously given serious consideration;
3. By supplementing, improving, or modifying the analyses,
4. By making factual corrections; or
5. By explaining why the comments do not warrant further agency response.

Major Issues Addressed

Viability of Plant And Wildlife Populations. By law the Forest must maintain viable populations of native and desired non-native species. Recently the Forest has experienced prolonged drought conditions, several large fires, and a bark beetle epidemic. Large fires and insect attacks can threaten numerous plant and animal species' habitat necessary for these species' continued persistence on the Forest. Prolonged fire suppression in conjunction with prolific ponderosa pine growth and encroachment has reduced other Forest vegetation types such as aspen. Yet management to reduce these forest health threats could itself threaten the habitat conditions other plant and animal species need.

Species viability is the assurance a given native or desired non-native plant or wildlife species will persist on the Black Hills over time. All alternatives maintain species viability on the Forest. The Forest examined a host of plant and animal species for viability concerns known as emphasis species. Emphasis species include federal threatened, endangered, and proposed species; U.S. Forest Service Region 2 sensitive species; Forest management indicator species (MIS); and species of local concern (SOLC).

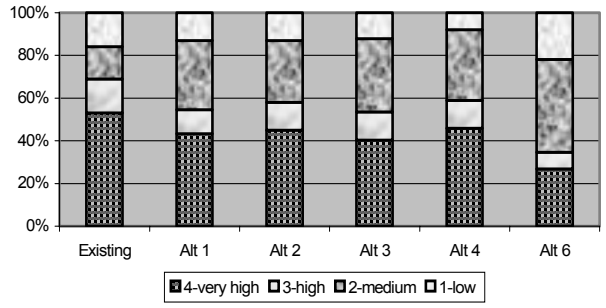
The SOLC process identified species that did not fall under federal protective status, yet their status on the Forest was in question. This process examined species lists from the states of Wyoming and South Dakota and lists from other organizations such as Partners in Flight (PIF), The Nature Conservancy, and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) that rank species for conservation based on risk criteria.

The Forest examined these species through an eight-step process (See Species of Local Concern Report) and found 89 species that warranted additional analysis for viability in the Phase II DEIS (See Chapter 3 and Appendix C). Again, all 89 species were found to be viable under all alternatives although tradeoffs between species do exist based on habitat conditions.

Not all alternatives treat the emphasis species the same. Alternative 1 ranks last for species viability, and Alternative 3 ranks first. Alternative 4 ranks second best, relies on natural processes to maintain species viability, favor late-successional species (those dependent on large continuous stands or mature forests), such as goshawk and brown creeper, and has limited emphasis on early-successional species habitat. Alternative 2 is roughly similar to Alternative 4 but lacks direction for maintaining dense mature ponderosa pine (structural stage 4C) and limited direction for spruce. Both have increased fire and mountain pine beetle risk

Alternative 6 would move the Forest towards pre-settlement processes and conditions and would favor early-successional species over late-successional species while maintaining viability in both. Alternative 3 manages for species diversity by breaking up the Forest for better overall habitat distribution and species diversity. Early-successional habitat is increased without significant decreases in late-successional habitat. Alternative 3 does not achieve landscape-scale reductions in fire and mountain pine beetle hazard and the corresponding reduction in habitat risk that Alternative 6 achieves.

Figure 1. Ten-Year Fire Hazard



Fire and Insect Hazard. Reducing the likelihood of stand replacement (all trees in a stand are lost to fire or insects, See Figure 3) through fire and insect attack on the Forest often involves thinning dense forest stands. Legal mandates to conserve species' habitat and

Figure 2. Ten-Year Mountain Pine Beetle Hazard

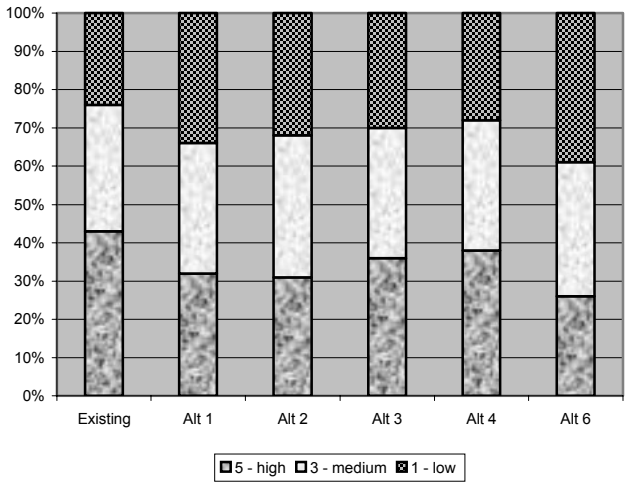


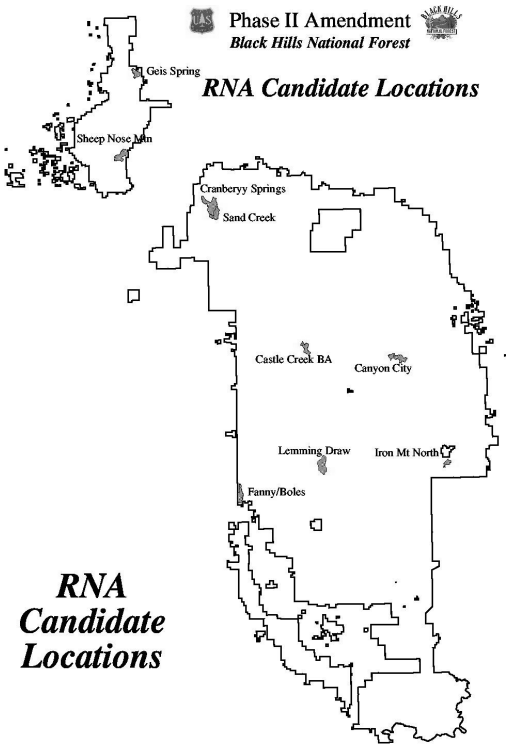
Figure 3—Jasper Fire Area.

populations could limit the degree to which the Forest can reduce threats to private and public property and those living in and near the Forest. Over 280,000 acres of private lands exist within the 1.5 million acre proclaimed Forest boundary. Recent large fires and insect epidemics on the Forest have destroyed habitat as well as other values on public and private property.

Alternative 6 requires a substantial increase in thinning and fuel treatment over the next ten years, more than double the current Forest Plan as amended (See Phase II DEIS Tables 2.3 and 2.5). This treatment level reduces fire hazard on the forest by 40 percent when compared to Alternative 3, the next best alternative (See Figures 1, 4, and 5).

High to moderate mountain pine beetle hazard is the least under Alternative 6 compared to other alternatives, followed by Alternatives 2, 1, 3, and 4 (See Figure 2).

Research Natural Area Assessment. In September 2000, as part of a legal settlement agreement, the Forest agreed to analyze candidate areas for research natural areas (RNAs), as part of the Phase II Amendment process. Direction for RNA management limits the level and types of management actions that can be applied in these areas.



Some believe the establishment of RNAs could restrict Forest actions to address fuel conditions and insect attacks. Others believe RNAs could provide

Figure 4. Thinning project near Black Hawk—Before.

Figure 5. Thinning project near Black Hawk—After.

valuable habitat conditions for species if surrounding lands are aggressively treated to reduce susceptibility to fire or insect hazard.

The Black Hills National Forest has been managed for over 120 years, and few areas meet RNA quality, condition, viability, and defensibility requirements for the nine plant series targeted for consideration as RNAs (See Phase II DEIS and Revised Final RNA Assessment on the Black Hills National Forest website). The Forest analyzed 120 areas encompassing almost 267,000 acres for RNA criteria. Most have had some disturbance, encumbrance, or other characteristics that eliminate the area from consideration. Nine areas totaling 8,700 acres are considered as candidates for RNA designation. Alternatives 1 and 2 do not have candidate RNAs because they are no-action alternatives, and Alternatives 3, 4, and 5 recommend 4, 9, and 5 candidates respectively.

Social and Economic Impacts. Stand-replacement fire and insect epidemics can change the character of the Forest from a tourism standpoint as well as change resource production for forage and wood fiber and impact the local economy. Stand-replacement fires and mountain beetle infestations also place private property at risk. Even though a house may be saved during a stand-replacement fire, the resulting black landscape on adjoining National Forest System lands may lower private property values.

Concerns were raised that measures adopted to protect species viability and diversity could limit management actions to meet objectives under Goal 3 of the 1997 Revised Forest Plan. Goal 3 provides for commodity production in an environmentally sustainable manner. It was determined that this issue should be tracked through the range of alternatives. Timber volume outputs expected under each alternative are displayed in the effects analysis as are the social and economic effects of these output levels.

The goal of fuel management is to retain a green forest after a wildfire has run through it. This occurs when wildfire is kept on the ground by effective fuel reduction versus having the wildfire running through the tree tops and leaving a blackened landscape behind. A green forest will help maintain private property values and be more appealing to tourists. Only Alternative 6 will significantly reduce fire hazard at a landscape scale. A lower fire hazard means a less intense fire and more green forest left once the fire is out. All other alternatives will reduce fire hazard only on a local site-specific scale.

To be most effective in minimizing mountain pine beetle outbreaks on the Forest and keep the outbreaks from spreading to adjoining lands, mountain pine beetle hazard management should occur at a landscape scale. Localized mountain pine beetle hazard reduction will make local trees more resistant to mountain pine beetles, but a running mountain pine beetle epidemic will attack and kill trees in even healthy stands. The Forest has tools to deal quickly with small scale outbreaks. Alternative 6 provides the most reduction of mountain pine beetle hazard. While not measurable in the hazard rating system, the Forest-wide fire hazard objective of 50 percent low-to-moderate hazard will increase the health and vigor of the trees against mountain beetle attack in treated areas.

Under current operating procedures for local sawmills, the Forest would need to supply 60 percent of the wood fiber that local mills process (estimated at 101 million board feet annually +/-15 percent) for all mills to remain viable. Only Alternative 6 is expected to produce wood fiber near this level. Three timber mills make up 90 percent of local wood fiber production, and one or more of these mills are at risk if the expected harvest levels of Alternatives 1, 2, 3, or 4 occur. The value of wood products removed from the Forest is critical to assure effective implementation of fuel and insect reduction projects. The other option analyzed in Alternative 4 is to allow unavoidable fire and mountain pine beetle events to be managed at a landscape scale.

Decisions To Be Made

The Rocky Mountain Regional Forester will decide whether to amend direction in the 1997 Revised LRMP and if so in what manner. He will base his decision on the EIS analysis and the accompanying Administrative Record. The Regional Forester will prepare and sign a Record of Decision (ROD) for the Phase II Amendment incorporating any amended management direction into the LRMP. This resource management direction will remain in place until the LRMP is amended or revised according to National Forest Management Act (NFMA) regulations.

The following decisions, which meet the purpose and need described in Phase II DEIS Section 1-4, are to be made in the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Phase II Amendment:

- If and how the goals, objectives, standards, guidelines, and monitoring requirements in-

(Continued on page 6)

cluded in the 1997 Revised LRMP will be modified to address species viability (including northern goshawk) and diversity (including MIS);

- Whether candidate RNAs will be proposed for designation on the Forest and if so which ones; and
- Whether to modify Forest management direction for fire and insect hazard to address both species viability and diversity and threats to human life and property, especially around at-risk communities (ARC) and in wildland-urban interface (WUI) areas and if so in what manner.

The Forest has determined that the following elements of the 1997 Revised LRMP are still adequate and will not be addressed in the Phase II Amendment:

- Management area (MA) allocations except for the possible addition of RNAs;
- The number of acres of unsuitable timber land and the allowable sale quantity (ASQ) for the remaining acres; and
- Designation of new roadless or recommended wilderness areas; providing additional protection for roadless areas; or consideration of other special designations such as Wild and Scenic Rivers or special interest areas.

Overall, the direction in the 1997 Revised LRMP will generally remain unchanged unless a change is required to adequately address species viability and diversity, RNAs, MIS, northern goshawk, or fire or insect hazard.

Alternatives

The five alternatives considered for detailed analysis in this Phase II DEIS are characterized in this section. Alternative 5 was eliminated from further detailed study (refer to Section 2.4). These alternatives consider each of the decision areas identified in Section 1-4: wildlife viability, RNAs, and fire and insect hazard. Each alternative meets the purpose and need in Section 1-4.

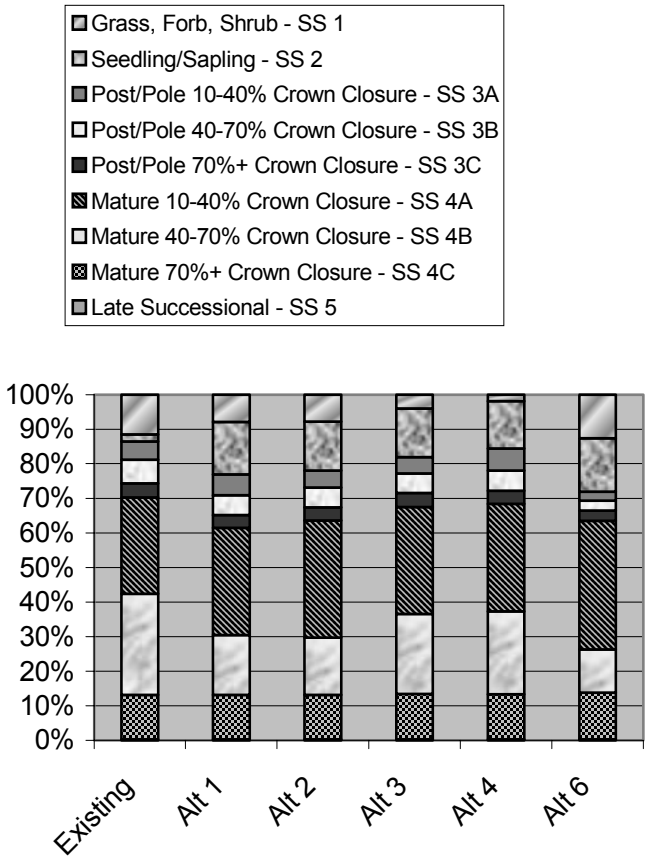
Alternative 1, 1997 Revised Plan. This alternative corresponds to Alternative G in the 1996 EIS as selected in the 1997 ROD with modifications. It does not include the revisions made under the Phase I Amendment. It is a No-Action Alternative because changes made in the interim Phase I Amendment could be deemed necessary for the long-term. This alternative is used to compare to analysis in the 1996 EIS. This alternative could be selected if re-evaluation demonstrates the original analysis and management direction is sufficient to meet diversity and viability requirements.

Alternative 2, Long-Term Adoption of Interim Phase I Amendment. This alternative is a No-Action Alternative for the Phase II Amendment. It permanently adopts the short-term changes made in the Phase I Interim Amendment. It was originally intended to provide for increased species and habitat conservation pending completion of the Phase II Amendment, with an emphasis on later-successional species. Again, if selected, the Phase I Amendment direction would become permanent.

***Alternative 3, Diversity* Across *the Landscape*.** This alternative focuses primarily on species viability by incorporating actions taken under the 1997 Plan and adding the following:

Structural stage objectives for habitat for emphasis species to provide viability and through large increases in the acres of aspen, bur oak, meadow, grassland, and riparian (See Figure 6 and Table 1).

Figure 6 - Ten-Year Structural Stages



Recommends four Candidate RNAs.

Reduction in fire and insect hazard in the wildland-urban interface (WUI), adjacent to at-risk communities

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Table 1—Comparison of Key Alternatives Components

Component	Alternative 1 No-Action, 1997 Revised LRMP (Alternative G)	Alternative 2 No-Action, Phase I Amendment	Alternative 3 Diversity across the Landscape	Alternative 4 Phase I with Additional Mature Forest	Alternative 6 Reduced Fire and Insect Hazard
Species Viability—Habitat Acres Restored in Decade 1	Ten-year restoration objectives (conversion from ponderosa pine) Aspen – 4,100 Acres Bur oak – 900 Acres Meadow – 100 Acres Riparian – 500 Acres Prairie grassland – 10,400 Acres	Same as Alternative 1	Ten-year restoration objectives Aspen – 46,000 Acres Bur oak – 4,000 Acres Meadow – 2,400 Acres Riparian – 1,000 Acres Prairie grassland – 12,000 Acres	Ten-year restoration objectives Aspen – 8,200 Acres Bur oak – 1,800 Acres Meadow – 100 Acres Riparian – 500 Acres Prairie grassland – 10,400 Acres	Ten-year restoration objectives Aspen – 54,000 Acres Bur oak – 4,000 Acres Meadow – 2,400 Acres Riparian – 1,000 Acres Prairie grassland – 12,000 Acres
Species Viability Management Approach	Seeks to manage species viability and diversity of plant and animal communities and natural forest functions through restoration of some hardwood, meadow, and riparian areas.	Seeks to manage species viability and diversity by increased conservation of habitat for sensitive and late-succession species per LRMP Phase I Amendment .	Seeks to manage species viability and diversity (89 emphasis species) across the landscape through diversity in cover types and pine structural stages. Generally maintains a balance of open-and closed-crown mature forests.	Seeks to manage species viability and diversity (89 emphasis species) through unavoidable natural processes associated with a Black Hills late-succession forest .	Seeks to manage species viability and diversity (89 emphasis species) across the landscape through diversity in cover types and pine structural stages consistent with measures needed to aggressively reduce-fire-and-insect hazard. Generally creates a more open-grown mature forest.
Average Annual Non-Commercial Ponderosa Pine Treatment Acres	15,400	15,400	20,000	12,500	46,000
Average Annual Commercial Ponderosa Pine Treatment Acres	13,100	14,200	7,100	4,900	18,500
Research Natural Area (RNA) Recommendations	No candidate RNAs	No candidate RNAs	4 candidate RNAs (3,482 total acres)	9 candidate RNAs (8,691 total acres)	5 candidate RNAs selected away from ARC (4,979 total acres)
RNA Targeted Plant Series Included in Existing or Candidate RNAs	Ponderosa Pine	Ponderosa Pine	Bur Oak, Ponderosa Pine, Montane Willow, Mountain Mahogany/ Skunkbrush, White Spruce	Bur Oak, Ponderosa Pine, Montane Grassland, Montane Willow, Mountain Mahogany/Skunkbrush, White Spruce	Bur Oak, Ponderosa Pine, Montane Willow, White Spruce

(ARC), and on a case-by-case basis as needed for species conservation throughout the Forest.

Alternative 4, Phase I with Additional Mature Forests. This alternative features late-successional forests by incorporating provisions of the Phase I Amendment and adding the following:

Increased emphasis on species viability by conserving and beginning the process of creating more late-successional-forest acres. It protects and recruits additional late-successional stands from dense mature stands.

Recommends nine candidate RNAs.

Reduction in fire and insect hazard in the WUI adjacent to ARC.

Alternative 5, Harvest Growth. This alternative is no longer being considered. See Phase II DEIS Section 2-4—Alternatives Considered and Eliminated from Further Detailed Study.

Alternative 6, Reduce Fire and Insect Hazard. This emphasizes fire and insect hazard reduction while maintaining viable populations of native and desired non-native species. It incorporates actions taken under the 1997 LRMP and also includes the following:

Establishes structural-stage and vegetative composition objectives similar to Alternative 3 but generally provides for more open mature forest. It has aggressive fire and insect management yet provides for species viability. Treatments focus first in the WUI using hardwood, riparian, grassland, and meadow restoration, and in ponderosa pine using non-commercial thins, mechanical fuel reduction treatments, burning, and commercial harvests. These treatments will increase the acres of aspen, bur oak, meadow, grassland, and riparian, which meets fuel management objectives and provides habitat for species viability.

Recommends five candidate RNAs.

Reduces fire and insect hazard in the WUI adjacent to ARC as the first priority and on the rest of the Forest as a second priority.

These alternatives are described in more detail in the Phase II DEIS Chapter 2 but are best understood within the framework of management goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines the USFS uses (See Phase II DEIS Appendix D-Land and Resource Management Plan Direction by Alternative). An LRMP such as the Forest's 1997 publication establishes specific Forest goals. These goals are broad, general statements that encompass the desired future conditions the USFS seeks. Management objectives are identified to guide efforts toward meeting LRMP goals. Applying standards and guidelines may limit objective attainment. Standards are defined as mandatory courses of action; any deviation from standards requires amending the LRMP. Guidelines are preferred or advisable courses of action; deviations from guidelines are permissible, but the responsible official must document the reasons in the project document.

Each alternative examined in the Phase II DEIS represents an alternative LRMP. Each alternative comprises a specific suite of goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines. Each alternative contains the following nine goals, which originated with the 1997 LRMP:

1. Protect basic soil, air, water, and cave resources.
2. Provide for a variety of life through management of biologically diverse ecosystems.
3. Provide for sustained commodity uses in an environmentally acceptable manner. This includes timber harvest, livestock grazing, and locatable and leasable mineral extraction.
4. Provide for scenic quality, a range of recreational opportunities, and protection of heritage resources in response to the needs of the Forest visitors and local communities.
5. In cooperation with other landowners, strive for improved land ownership and access that benefit both public and private landowners.
6. Improve financial efficiency for all programs and projects.
7. Emphasize cooperation with individuals, organizations, and other agencies while coordinating planning and project implementation.
8. Promote rural development opportunities.
9. Provide high-quality customer service.

While fuel and insect hazard direction is present in the LRMP, the direction lacks the weight of LRMP goals for Forest fuel and insect hazard management. The lack of fuel and insect goals results in direction for other forest multiple uses, such as fish, wildlife, or recreation that take precedence over fuel and insect considerations. On the ground, the concern continues; fuel and insect hazards are allowed to increase, creating conditions that pose a significant threat to the very resources (fish, wildlife, plants, and recreation) being protected in other LRMP direction. The solution proposed is to develop LRMP goals for fire and insect management to better

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Table 2. Alternative Species Viability and Habitat Elements

Species (habitat)	Discussion
Brown Creeper (MIS for late-successional forest)	All alternatives would provide core habitat for the brown creeper (structural stages 4C and 5). All alternatives maintain a viable population; however, they all show a decrease in secondary habitat and an increased risk of population decline with Alternative 6 showing the most, followed by Alternatives 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively
White-tailed deer *(MIS for early-successional forest and understory shrubs)*	Open forest conditions, which promote understory shrub, are expected to increase in all alternatives. Alternative 6 has the most potential for increasing deer forage and understory shrubs, followed by Alternatives 1, 2, 3, and 4.
Golden-crowned kinglet *(MIS for white spruce habitat)*	Alternatives 1, 2, and 4 would likely remove some spruce for hardwood restoration and fire hazard reduction. Alternatives 3 and 6 would have the most potential to remove spruce because of higher hardwood restoration and/or fuel treatment acreage. Mature and late-succession spruce is maintained except for potential treatment within 300 feet of structures in Alternative 6. Overall, the amount of spruce and the golden-crown kinglet population is expected to remain stable under all alternatives.
Ruffed grouse *(MIS for aspen habitat)*	All alternatives strive for an increase in the amount of aspen habitat. Alternatives 3 and 6 show the most potential for increasing aspen acres. Abundance and distribution of ruffed grouse will likely follow the same pattern.
Common yellowthroat *(MIS for shrubby riparian habitat, beaver)*	Riparian habitats will be maintained and restored through implementation of objectives, standards, and guidelines in all alternatives. Alternatives 3 and 6 have the highest targets for riparian restoration. Alternative 6 places a priority on riparian projects in the WUI. Yellowthroat populations are expected to remain stable or increase in riparian areas.
Beaver *(MIS for hardwood and riparian habitat)*	Riparian habitats will be maintained and restored through implementation of objectives, standards, and guidelines in all alternatives. Alternatives 3 and 6 have the highest targets for riparian restoration. Alternative 6 places a priority on riparian projects in the WUI. Beaver populations are expected to remain stable or increase in riparian areas.
Black-backed woodpecker *(MIS for snag habitat and recently burned habitat)*	In all alternatives, populations are expected to decline from recent high levels as recent fires age (recent burned acreage is higher than normal). Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 6 include adequate snag direction. Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 6 are consistent with recent snag inventories and studies. Alternative 1 manages for snag densities below these recent estimates and studies, which increase risk. Burned habitat will likely be lowest in Alternative 6 followed by Alternative 3. Alternatives 3, 4, and 6 provide direction for leaving portions of recent fires un-salvaged. Alternatives 1 and 2 contain no direction for post fire conditions, which increases uncertainty.
Mountain sucker *(MIS for Aquatic habitat)*	All alternatives maintain aquatic species through implementation of standards, guidelines, watershed conservation practices, and State best management practices (BMPs). Alternatives 3 and 6 propose more aquatic/riparian restoration than Alternatives 1, 2, and 4. Effects on aquatic resources potentially increases with the amount of surface disturbance. Alternative 6 has the most, and Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 are similar with about half the acres of Alternative 6. Alternative 4 is about one-quarter the acres of Alternative 6. Fuel reduction is expected to reduce extent and severity of wildfire, thus reducing watershed damage and effects on aquatic habitat.

Table 2—Continued. Alternative Species Viability and Habitat Elements

Species *(habitat*	Discussion
Goshawk	Goshawk populations have the potential to decline the most in Alternatives 1 and 6, followed by Alternative 2. Alternatives 3 and 4 will likely result in goshawk populations similar to current conditions. All alternatives maintain viable populations. *Alternative 3* takes the most proactive approach to providing habitat across the Forest and contains the most population-viability certainty because it includes an ecosystem strategy that uses reserves combined with desired structural-stage conditions in key management areas (MAs). *Alternative 4* increases the risk goshawk nests will burn because it relies more on late-succession reserves in a historically frequently disturbed ecosystem coupled with the least potential reduction in fire hazard among the alternatives. As a result, population-viability for Alternative 4 is less certain than for Alternative 3. In *Alternative 2*, some uncertainty that nesting habitat will remain as expected during implementation exists because there is no objective, standard, or guideline in the ecosystem approach that conserves structural stage 4C stands. Moderately dense, mature forest habitat is expected to decline in Alternative 2, resulting in less moderately dense habitat than Reynolds et al (1992) suggest, causing additional uncertainty. *Alternative 6* presents a moderate amount of uncertainty and therefore risk because the goshawk population status under historic conditions is unknown and moderately dense, mature forest habitat is expected to decline the most. In addition, Alternative 6 will likely create more open stand conditions in more homogeneous patterns than under the other alternatives. Alternative 6 is expected to have the least risk of wildfire habitat loss. *Alternative 1* provides the least certainty for goshawk-population viability. Alternative 1 allows habitat capability to decline by 10 percent for a given project (Guideline 3201), which may lead to a continuous long-term decline in habitat capability. Uncertainty exists that nesting habitat will remain as expected during implementation because there is no objective, standard, or guideline in the ecosystem approach that conserves structural stage 4C stands. Moderately dense mature forest habitat is expected to decline in Alternative 1, resulting in less than Reynolds et al (1992) suggest.
American marten	All alternatives except Alternative 1 contain guidance to maintain mature spruce and movement corridors for marten. Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 would have the least effect on the marten. Fuel treatment acres in Alternative 6 create somewhat more potential to affect marten; however, the amount of spruce habitat across the Forest will likely remain stable, and fuel management objectives provide flexibility to avoid spruce. Alternative 1 would have the most potential for negative effects because it lacks direction specific to marten habitat and connectivity.

balance the project decisions and the overall Forest condition.

Alternatives 3, 4, and 6 include evaluation of two additional goals and a corresponding set of objectives for fire and insect hazard reduction management and recovery following natural catastrophic events. Objectives for Goals 10 and 11 vary by alternative, so implementation requirements would also vary.

10. Establish and maintain a mosaic of vegetation conditions to reduce occurrences of catastrophic fire and insect epidemics and facilitate insect management and fire fighting.

11. Enhance or maintain the natural rate of recovery after significant fire and other natural events while maintaining a mosaic of fuel-loading conditions to facilitate future fire-suppression activities.

The Phase II Amendment alternatives contain different objectives, standards, and guidelines that relate to species viability and diversity, RNAs, and fire and insect hazard. These differences occur primarily in Goals 2, 10, and 11. There are no differences in objectives being considered in the Phase II Amendment that relate to Goals 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, or 9. Only minor differences in objectives are being considered for Goals 3 and 4. Standards and guidelines relating to other goals are modified in Alternatives 3, 4, and 6 where they conflict with objectives under Goals 2, 10, and 11. How these standards and guidelines change is a part of the description of al-

(Continued on page 11)

Next Steps

What	When	Where
Publish the Notice of Availability (NOA) in the Federal Register. This starts the 90-day public comment period on the Phase II DEIS.	Mid-September 2004	
Host open houses during the public-comment period to help people understand the Phase II DEIS or discuss the DEIS contents. Additional maps and displays as well as Forest Service staff will be available to assist you in understanding and commenting on the DEIS.	October 5—Custer, SD 2-8 p.m.	Forest Supervisor's Office, Main Conference Room 25041 North Highway 16 Custer, SD 57730 605-673-9200
	October 6—Spearfish, SD 2-8 p.m.	Northern Hills Ranger District Office 2014 North Main Street Spearfish, SD 57783 605-642-4622
	October 12— Rapid City, SD 2-8 p.m.	Mystic Ranger District Office 803 Soo San Drive Rapid City, SD 57702-3142 605-343-1567
	October 19—Sundance, WY 2-8 p.m.	Bearlodge Ranger District Office 121 South 21st Street Sundance, WY 82729-0680 307-283-1361
	October 20—Newcastle, WY 2-8 p.m.	Hell Canyon Ranger District Office, Newcastle 1225 Washington Boulevard Newcastle, WY 82701-2953 307-746-2782
Public comment period ends.	Mid-December 2004	
Analyze public comments and develop Final EIS and ROD.	Summer 2005	

Figure 7—Open pine near Custer along Mickelson Trail.

ternatives (Sections 2-3.1 through 2-3.5).

Tables 1 and 2 describe key components of the alternatives. Table 1 discusses the major differences between alternatives and Table 2 discusses by alternative the ecological relationship and effects to MIS and two species of high interest in the 1997 Appeal Decision (goshawk and American marten). A more thorough summary can be found in the Phase II DEIS Chapter 2 and the complete analysis can be found in Chapter 3 and Appendix C of the Phase II DEIS.

Northern Goshawk

Figure 7—Aspen near Custer along Mickelson Trail.

Where to Submit Your Comments on the Draft EIS

Once you have completed your comments, you can send them to us for consideration and review. Please provide your name, address, phone number, and e-mail with any comments submitted. You can submit your comments in two ways:

1. **Via E-mail (preferred)—**E-mail your comments to **bhnf-phase2@saic.com.**
2. **By Mail—**Mail your comments to**:**
   BHNF Phase II Amendment
   P.O. Box 270990
   Littleton, CO 80127-0017.

Comments on the Draft EIS must be postmarked by the last day of the 90-day comment period (to be posted on "http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/blackhills/projects/planning" after date of publication in the Federal Register).

Figure 10—Dense pine in Norbeck Area.

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